

Editorial

This collection of papers has emerged from the Language Education across Borders conference held at the University of Graz, Austria in 2017 (see also Kostoulas, 2019). In the age of translanguaging, multilingualism, multiculturalism, globalization, international migration, transnationalism, and the blending of content and language education, there is an ever greater need in language education to reflect on the interconnections and overlap between languages, disciplines, constructs, and contexts that have traditionally been conceptualized in bounded ways. Instead, professional and personal domains have got increasingly permeable boundaries leading to emergent qualities that require new ways of theorizing, researching and teaching. The idea behind the conference was to promote interdisciplinary exchange and encourage people to challenge the notions of borders of all kinds. The aim was to promote discourse and exchange and re-think the fragmentation and separation imposed by borders – real or imagined. It was hoped that by prompting people to reflect on the kinds of borders that bound their research and practice, we would be challenged to think outside of these borders and find the rich, creative space that can lead to innovation and fresh perspectives on the familiar.

We believe that the articles in this special issue illustrate just how widely the authors have engaged with this notion of “border crossing.” Borders mentioned in the articles include geographical borders, cultural borders, linguistic borders, socio-cultural borders, psychological borders, disciplinary borders, as well as the border between digital and non-digital domains. Kaur begins by showing how the students in her study have crossed geographical, socio-cultural and linguistic borders to access education and the challenges this poses and the strategies they employ to manage this. Kimura and Hayashi show how when their students cross geographical, socio-cultural, and psychological borders in the context of a study abroad, they are able to grow as L2 learners and individuals. Indeed, Hessel too examines the context of study abroad and concludes, “crossing borders features prominently as a theme in study abroad, not only in

terms of students' physical border crossings, but also in their intercultural interactions with L2 speakers." Her work shows that study abroad represents a classic context to highlight the kinds of border crossings that international student mobility can lead to and the potential for growth inherent in this. Lütge, Merse, Owczarek and Stannard explore a different kind of space but an equally topical one, namely, the boundaries between the digital and analogue world, and they argue specifically in favor of crossing these borders in respect to the teaching and use of literature in the EFL classroom. Finally, Resnik and Schallmoser look at the emotional and psychological transitions in learning across borders – real and virtual.

Altogether this is a rich, varied collection of papers that highlight some of the ways in which learners can cross borders and how these border crossings can be harnessed to generate rich affordances for learning. There remains much work that can be done in interdisciplinary and cross-border spaces. Not only learners transition these domains but teachers do as well. At present, the research agenda for work in hybrid, blended, interconnected and transdisciplinary spaces remains excitingly open for exploration in theoretical, empirical and practical terms. Trans-, inter-, cross-, multi-, and pluri-, are becoming the new norms. The profession of language education is dynamic, multifaceted and experiencing enormous transformations on global, local and virtual levels. As such, the work we do will need to challenge and extend traditional linguistic, cultural, social, physical and disciplinary boundaries in order to meet the demands that this ever-changing new reality implies as well as reap the benefits for learners and teachers of those rich, fertile trans-border spaces.

The special issue contains the following articles: In the first paper in this collection, Kashmir Kaur outlines the results of an empirical investigation into Chinese students' perceptions of their study experience in the UK, tracing their transition in terms of identity and their professional and linguistic development. She uses focus group interviews and compares this study abroad group to Chinese students experiencing EMI in their home country. Also in the field of study abroad, Harumi Kimura and Brenda Hayashi analyze the accounts of Japanese L2 learners who took part in a short study abroad program in the US to explore their linguistic and personal growth following their stay. Their qualitative study starts where other studies often end by describing the students' retrospective perceptions of their study abroad experience. In their conclusion, the authors call for short-term study programs without exclusive focus on L2 learning that focus on creating opportunities for social interaction and are open to first-year-students. Hessel's study is based on quantitative research, which is also contextualized in a study abroad program. In contrast to the previous studies, she focuses on lingua franca interactions by investigating the frequently neglected interactions among international students and their influence on the student's L2

self-motivation to use and further improve the L2. Hessel's study shows the potential of international student interactions as a valuable opportunity for second language acquisition, self-motivation, and intercultural learning.

These articles are followed by two papers that are concerned with aspects of foreign language learning in digital contexts. Lütge, Merse, Owczarek and Stannard explore the interaction with and production of digital literary texts. The authors go beyond merely suggesting a model because their paper also includes practical implications and provides examples for putting the integration of digital texts in foreign language teaching into practice. In the fifth and final paper, Resnik and Schallmoser offer a new perspective on tandem learning by investigating the online collaboration of L1 (first language) users in tertiary education who supported each other in the language learning process. In addition to the increased autonomy and reciprocity that an e-tandem scheme provides, Resnik and Schallmoser also report on the sources of the learners' perceived enjoyment such as receiving one-on-one feedback, perceived improvement in their linguistic proficiency and the development of friendships.

In sum, we hope that this special issue has remained true to the spirit of the conference and will inspire "border crossings" of all kinds and engagement in diverse domains of trans-, inter-, cross-, multi-, and pluri- types of research.

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References

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